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Power Permutations in Early Hindi Manuscripts: Who Asks the Questions and Who Gives the Answers, Rāmānand or Kabīr?

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Power Permutations in Early Hindi Manuscripts: Who Asks the Questions and Who Gives the Answers, Rāmānand or Kabīr?

Abstract

What work do manuscripts perform? How are we to understand their socio-political impact? What happens when we find drastically different permutations of the same dialogical text in multiple manuscripts, where the interlocutors take different positions in different versions? How do we deal with that in the light of existing printed editions that intervene and “freeze” one version and marginalize others? This paper focuses on how old Hindi dialogical texts fare in manuscript and print, with the case study of the dialogue between the famous iconoclastic Kabīr and his purported guru the Rāma-worshiper Rāmānand, as preserved in a fascinating illustrated manuscript from the beginning of the eighteenth century that combines yogic and devotional texts.

Keywords

Manuscript studies, Old Hindi, India, Devotional texts, Rāmānand, Ramananda, Kabir, Gyan-tilak (Jnan-tilak), Barthwal, guru, bhakti, Hindi canon, Hindi manuscripts, philosophical dialogue

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Power Permutations in Early Hindi Manuscripts: Who Asks the Questions and Who Gives the Answers, Rāmānand or Kabīr?

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Introduction: Canon-Freezing

WHEN HINDI EMERGED AS a national language at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the tasks at hand was the construction of the canon of its literature. This led to a feverish search for “Early Hindi” texts that could be pressed into service to give the language a respectable literary pedigree.¹ A major role was played by Brahmin professors of Hindi at the newly founded Banaras Hindu University, first by Rāmcandra Śukla (1884–1941), who published the monumental *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās* (Literary History of Hindi) in 1929, and later especially by Pītāmbhar Datt Bārthvāl (1901–1944) and Hazārīprasād Dvivedī (1907–1997), who zoomed in on the “middle period”

This paper was first presented at the Annual Conference for South Asia Studies in Madison on 27 October 2017 for the panel “Social and Religious Debates in Early Hindi Narratives” organized by David Lorenzen. I am grateful to the comments from the other panelists and the audience at that occasion as well as comments on the first draft by Monika Horstmann and Peter Friedlander. I am also grateful to the Wellcome Library in London for providing the high-resolution images reproduced here.

1 For this complex process, the classical study is Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth-Century North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

of devotional literature (*bhakti*).² They published editions of what they deemed to be seminal texts on the basis of the thousands of manuscripts amassed by organizations for the promotion of Hindi, such as the Nāgarī Pracārīṇī Sabhā in Benares.

The selection process of what did and what did not make it into the canon was deeply influenced by the rising tide of nationalism and communalism.³ In the process, some manuscripts were favored and their texts were “frozen” in print, whereas others were marginalized. Further “freezing” happened during the transcription process: as Hindi manuscripts were prepared for the printed page, significant decisions had to be made to resolve ambiguities in the original. In manuscripts, the words are typically not separated from each other, and alternate word breaks are frequently a possibility; punctuation is missing or random, which leads to different interpretations in what constitutes a line, what is meta-textual (such as stage directions), and what is not. To make things more complicated, Hindi orthography was not yet fixed in the manuscripts. For instance, short, unstressed vowels might be rendered interchangeably as *-a-*, *-i-*, or *-u-*, and long or short vowels of the same type might be interchangeable, such as *-a-* for *-ā-* and vice versa. This leads to considerable ambiguity in cases of minimal pairs, such as *Rāma* (the male God) and *Rāmā* (his wife). Finally, the characters used for some consonants are easily conflated with others. In short, manuscripts left their editors plenty of scope for ambiguity, misunderstanding, and overinterpretation. While we owe much to the pioneers who prepared the early editions, we should not take their work at face value. Given the nationalist context in which the editing took place, it is imperative to return to the manuscripts to form a historically informed view of the evolution of

2 For *nirguṇa bhakti* literature in print, including more popular publications, see Francesca Orsini, “Booklets and Saints: Religious Publics and Literary History,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38, no. 3 (2015): 435–49. For a clear overview of the different publics for Kabīr specifically, see Peter Friedlander, “Kabir and the Print Sphere: Negotiating Identity,” *Thesis Eleven* 113, no. 1 (2012): 45–56.

3 “Communalism” refers to the hardening of ethno-religious identities to the point of violent conflict, in particular between Hindus and Muslims. For the influence of print, see also Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920–1940* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

the texts pre-print. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the importance of gaining this perspective by “defrosting” one such text and bringing some of its alter-ego manuscripts back into view.

Bringing fluidity back into foundational texts is particularly important for those that belong to the genre of religious debate. These texts, with titles including words like *saṃvād* (dialogue), *milan* (meeting), *goṣṭhī* (gathering), or *bodh* (enlightenment), often present two sides of an issue to establish an authoritative position. Once printed, a hierarchy is firmly established between the two: the challenger and the defendant, even where the manuscript tradition allows for multiple outcomes in different recensions. If the printed version is without investigation accepted as representing the final or even only one, alternative voices are silenced and the diversity of the tradition is lost, as is historical breadth. Revisiting the manuscripts also provides an opportunity to reflect on the materiality of how debates were remembered, as well as what indications of performative aspects of the dialogical texts can be revealed behind what is preserved on the printed page.

A Dialogue Between a Strident Student, Kabīr, and His Purported Guru, Rāmānand

This article seeks to jump-start a broader “defrosting” by puzzling together a few pieces of the transmission history of one such debate that is crucial for understanding the prevalent role of Rāma devotion in contemporary India. It studies a dialogue between the popular iconoclastic Early Hindi poet Kabīr of Benares (possible fl. 1450–1500) and the man purported to be his guru, the mysterious Rāmānand.⁴ Very little is known with certainty about the latter, and interpretations of his life, including his date and significance, differ substantially according to different sects. Still, numerous

4 Kabir’s dates have been much debated; for a summary of the argumentation, see David N. Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananta-das’s Kabir Parachai* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 9–18.

contemporary devotees of the god Rāma trace their spiritual lineage to him, seeing themselves as members of the Rāmānand-sampradāy. Many also hold that notwithstanding his being a high-born Brahmin devotee of Rāma, Rāmānand initiated in the sect many low-borns, including the weaver Kabīr, who insisted that his god was *nirguṇa*—that is, beyond human traits, not limited to the Rāma of the Brahminical stories. The link between Kabīr and Rāmānand has been a central point in the research of the overwhelmingly high-caste Hindī canon-maker scholars, which in turn has drawn strong criticism from low castes, who see it as an attempt to Brahminize Kabīr.⁵ This is not merely an academic issue; at stake is nothing less than whether the transformative experiences on offer in Kabīr’s poetry can or should be considered to be rooted in Brahminical orthodoxy.

Incongruent as the assertion of the initiation may be, it has been around for at least four centuries, and it has been accepted by many followers of Kabīr. The first evidence dates from around 1600, about a century after what can roughly be surmised to be Kabīr’s date of death, and unsurprisingly within circles of the Rāmānand-sampradāy. Two Rāmānandī hagiographers figure importantly. First, the hagiographer Nābhādās included Kabīr in a list of disciples of Rāmānand in his influential listing of “who’s who in the universe of devotion,” or *Bhakt-māl*.⁶ Around the same time, his junior colleague Anantdās expanded upon the legends circulating about Kabīr in his *Kabīr-parcāī*, which features the story of his initiation by Rāmānand, at least in some (later attested) versions of the text that were preserved by one sect outside the Rāmānandī fold (the Nirañjanīs).⁷ As the story goes, since

5 For Dvivedī’s views on Kabīr, see Monika Horstmann, “Hazārīprasād Dvivedī’s Kabīr,” in *Images of Kabīr*, ed. M. Horstmann (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 115–26. For a strident denouncement of Dvivedī’s appropriation, see Dharmvir, “Complete Eclipse of the Sun: Dvivedī’s Kabīr,” *Hindī: Language, Discourse, Writing: A Quarterly Journal of Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University* 1 (2000): 188–207.

6 See William Pinch, “History, Devotion, and the Search for Nabhadās of Galtā,” in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 367–99.

7 *Kabīr-parcāī* is studied and translated by Lorenzen in *Kabīr Legends*, 23–42, 93–128. For the manuscript evidence, see Lorenzen, *Kabīr Legends*, 73–91, and compare with Winand

Kabīr was of low caste, he had to resort to stratagem to receive the sacred mantra from the Brahmin guru's mouth if he wanted to legitimize his practice of devotion. So he tricked Rāmānand by lying in the darkness on the chosen guru's path, as the latter was on his way to take his sacred bath in the Ganges early in the morning, descending the stairs toward the river in Benares. When he stumbled over the low-caste weaver, the surprised Brahmin uttered an exclamation "Rām!" ("My God!"), which Kabīr took as an initiation with the holy mantra of the sect. When Rāmānand later challenged him that such is not sufficient to become a devotee, Kabīr insisted on its validity, asserting in one recension of the text:

If the guru and God [Govinda] show favor and one meets the true guru, nothing is difficult. Everything is easy and spontaneous [*sahaja*]. This is what all the holy men say. Show yourself, Master, Give me your darshan. If you don't give it, I will weep and die.⁸

Rāmānand relented and recognized Kabīr as his disciple, so the story goes. These Rāmānandī hagiographers' view of things represents Kabīr as upwardly mobile and somewhat grudgingly acknowledges a mostly formal "membership" of Kabīr in their group. It is important to note that this falls well short of the "transformative experience" twentieth-century high-caste scholarship imagines the meeting with Rāmānand had for Kabīr, for which, it should be said, there is little corroboration in Kabīr's own work.⁹ We might add that Kabīr soon overshadowed his guru in popularity, to the point that we have to search to find works attributed to Rāmānand, while Kabīr's verses are included in numerous anthologies and manuscripts and remain perennially in print. In that light the Rāmānandīs stood to gain much by the association with Kabīr, and historians convincingly argue the

Callewaert and Swapna Sharma, *The Hagiographies of Anantadās* (London: Curzon, 2000), esp. 1–27, 43–98.

8 Translation from Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends*, 95; text on 134, vv. 14–15, but this is missing in most manuscripts; compare with Callewaert and Sharma, *Hagiographies*, 58.

9 See Horstmann, "Hazārīprasād Dvivedī's Kabir," 115–26.

story was a sectarian move around 1600 to coopt Kabīr's appeal to lower-caste bhaktas for the Rāmānand-sampradāy.¹⁰

Those who believe that these two grand devotees were close would naturally want to eavesdrop on their conversations. What kind of philosophical debates would they have conducted? Did they influence one another? Could Kabīr's *nirguṇa* view have been reconciled with Rāmānand's Rāma devotion?¹¹ Sure enough, a dialogue, often entitled *Gyān-tilak* or *Jñān-tilak* (Mark of Wisdom), has been circulating in several versions, at least since the eighteenth century, in both Kabīr Panthī and *saguṇa* circles.¹² I want to draw

10 First suggested by Richard Burghart, then elaborated by William Pinch in his magisterial *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), esp. chapter 2.

11 Not just that, but identification of Kabīr with Rāma is a strong preoccupation of the influential Mahant of the Kabīr Chaura Math in Benares, Gaṅgārām Śāstri (David Swain, "Transformations in Kabīr Hagiography: Pre-modern to Modern Texts," in *Studies in Early Modern Indo-Aryan Languages, Literature and Culture* [New Delhi: Manohar, 1999], 398–401).

12 David Lorenzen, in *A Catalog of Manuscripts in the Kabir Chaura Monastery* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1994), located three similar texts in manuscript 014 dated 1801 (1858 VS) (pp. 301a–308a under the name *kaḥīr rāmanand pratham milan kī goṣṭhī*, 349a–351b under *kaḥīr-rāmānand kī goṣṭhī*, and 351b–355a under *Jñān-tilak*), and additionally in manuscripts 019, dated 1866 (1923 VS) (pp. 0b–10a), and 023, dated 1774 (1831 VS) (pp. 57b–65a). The latter are also entitled *kaḥīr aur rāmānand kā saṃvād*, 062, dated 1877 (1934 VS) (pp. B167a–170b). In addition, the National Mission for Manuscripts database, Bhāratiya Kṛiti-sampada, lists the following: attributed to Kabīr in Hindi, dated 1883 (VS 1940) in the Motilal Nehru Law College, of H.S. Gaur University, Sagar, manuscript no. NS000006505 (17 fols.). The same institution has also one in Sanskrit attributed to Rāmānand, accession number 1.2 (22 fols.); there is one attributed to Rāmānand in Hindi preserved in the Śrī Tridandidev Sanskrit Shodh Sansthān, acc. no. 14.6 (22 fols.), and one in Gurmukhi script in the Vishveshvarananda Vishva Bandhu Institute of Sanskrit and Indological Studies, Hoshiarpur acc. no. 265.2 (4 fols.). The same institution also has an unattributed *Jñān-tilak*, acc. no. 2884.2 (20 fols.). An unattributed Hindi text is preserved in the Vrindavan Research Institute in Vrindaban, acc. no. 11835C (14 fols.; together in a collection with a *dān-līlā* and *mantra-yantra* 11835A and B and a *Jānakī-maṅgal* written by a Mathurādās Nirmohī as 11835F), and there are two unattributed Sanskrit ones in the Sarasvatī Bhavan Library in Varanasi, manuscripts IGI000045684 (3 fols.) and IGI0000460244 (1 fol.), and another in the Nāgarī Pracārīṇī Sabhā, dated 1894, acc. no. 2461 (3 fols.). The catalogues of the manuscripts preserved at the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute in Jodhpur (Caupasni) also give several manuscripts

attention here to the earliest manuscript I am aware of, which also happens to be illustrated with a picture of the two men in conversation.

An Illustrated Manuscript

Text and image appear in an illustrated manuscript preserved, somewhat unexpectedly, in the Wellcome Collection in London, which specializes in the history of medicine. The tome made it into the collection because, as Peter Friedlander reports in his 1996 *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hindi Manuscripts*, it was sold as an “ancient Buddhist priest’s manuscript book” that supposedly contained “magical and medical formulae . . . [and] charms.”¹³ Perhaps this was due to the illustrations depicting holy men under trees, giving the impression of conveyance of botanical wisdom. Upon investigation, Friedlander points out, the volume is actually a compilation of loose-leaf folios that were bound together in somewhat random sequence, the core of which consists of yogic Nāth and *nirguṇa* devotional Sant works. Although its illustrations were reproduced more than two decades ago in Friedlander’s 1996 catalogue, this manuscript has attracted little scholarly attention.

The manuscript deserves to be studied in its own right for several reasons. For one, it contains several dialogical texts, between both Nāths and *nirguṇī* Sants.¹⁴ This makes the manuscript a rich source for studying dialogical

from the nineteenth century: vol. 1, p. 58, no. 508 (acc. no. 198 [3], which mentions Kabīr as śiṣya); vol. 2, p. 35, no. 564 (acc. no. 1093 [5] dated 1910 VS, scribe Harīdās in Alwar); vol. 4, p. 42, no. 452 (acc. no. 4669 [14] written by the scribe Rāmdās on 8 fols.); and vol. 7, p. 79, no. 744 (acc. no. 9132 [21] by the scribe Narsimhdās). The oldest I found reference to is from *Purāṭan*, vol. 19, pp. 80–81, no. 505 (acc. no. 34982 [9], dated 1801VS).

13 Peter Friedlander, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hindi Manuscripts in the Library of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine* (London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1996), 449. Now Wellcome Collection, MS Hindi 371.

14 The manuscript is comparable to another one from the same era that was described by Bārthwal, the so-called Pauri manuscript (named after the place where it was preserved at the time, the residence of the Garhwal Pandit Tārādatt Gairolā, who in turn received it from Dr. Daljang Singh of Jaipur (see Bārthwal’s *Traditions of Indian Mysticism Based upon Nirguṇa*

texts. Further, it contains many illustrations, which is rare in manuscripts of devotional works that are reckoned to belong to *nirguṇa sampradāys* or sects devoted to an abstract god.¹⁵ Whereas manuscripts with works in praise of Krishna or Rāma frequently are illustrated because storytelling of these *saguna* gods lends itself easily to images, this is much less the case for the *nirguṇa* counterparts.¹⁶ Furthermore, the manuscript's colophon (on fol. 188r) specifies the exact date on which the immediately preceding work was written down—in the rainy season of the year 1715 (1772 VS)—and situates the inscription of the text during the reign of the famous king Jai Singh II, founder of the city of Jaipur (*Savāi Jai Sī(n)gh rāje*). It also provides the name of the scribe, Tivāḍī Gokal, and the location, a sectarian center of a *nirguṇa* sect, the Dādūpanthī seat of Naraina, near Jaipur.

It is difficult to say with any certainty whether this colophon can be taken as firmly indicative for the entire manuscript, especially because the folios are not in sequence, so one cannot be sure whether the texts preceding what is now folio 188 were not written later. However, the handwriting of the colophon appears to be the same as that of *Gyān-tilak*. In any case, this colophon gives us a generic idea about where and when at least some of the original materials were written down. If the *Gyān-tilak* in the manuscript dates from this period, which seems highly likely, it is the earliest dated version that has been traced so far, a century and a half before the other known manuscripts of the work.

School of Hindi Poetry [New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1978], 283; he estimates it to be at least two hundred years old—that is, from ca. 1750). This manuscript also contained Nāth yogī bānīs as well as Dādūpanthī texts, in addition to a Pañc-vāṇī section at the beginning and a selection made by Rajjab at the end. Similarly, there is a manuscript dated 1714 in the Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā (no. 1409), used by Tiwari for his Kabīr edition (see Vinay Dharwadker, *Kabir: The Weaver's Songs* [New Delhi: Penguin, 2003], 37).

15 On the term and how it should *not* be understood as oppositional to *saguna*, see Mukund Lath, "The Nirgun Canon in Rajasthan," in *Religion, Ritual and Royalty*, ed. N. K. Singh and Rajendra Joshi (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1999), 102–8.

16 For this point with regard to the Nāths, see Debra Diamond's introduction to a rare set of Nāth paintings from Jodhpur in the first half of the nineteenth century, as part of the catalogue *Garden and Cosmos: The Royal Paintings of Jodhpur* (Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2008), 44–45. She refers to the manuscript studied here on 308 n. 33.



FIGURE 1. Rāmānand and Kabīr in conversation. Wellcome Collection, MS Hindi 371, fol. 150v.

The Rāmānand-Kabīr Relation in the Manuscript

The manuscript preserved in the Wellcome Collection contains a rare image of Rāmānand and Kabīr in conversation, seated under a mango tree (*bīrchī āmb*) (fol. 150v; fig. 1). Contrary to popular belief that Kabīr was initiated as a child or young adolescent, he is depicted as an adult with a beard. Both figures are portrayed on equal terms, as they are the same size and seated at the same level. Their hand gestures suggest an animated discussion; there is nothing to intimate a hierarchical encounter. This is in sharp contrast



FIGURE 2. Raidās and Kabīr in conversation. Wellcome Collection, MS Hindi 371, fol. 25r.

with the depictions in the same manuscript of other gurus with their child-disciples. For instance, the image of Matsyendranāth and Gorakhnāth (fol. 136r) shows the latter clearly in a subordinate position.¹⁷ Similarly, the image of Kabīr and Raidās shows the latter with reverently folded hands in front of Kabīr (fol. 25r).¹⁸ By contrast, the image of Rāmānand and Kabīr itself seems to refute the hierarchical relationship between the two. Does the text do the same?

¹⁷ Friedlander, *Descriptive Catalogue*, 589.

¹⁸ Friedlander, *Descriptive Catalogue*, 602, fig. 2.



FIGURE 3. Text facing image of Rāmānand and Kabir in conversation. Wellcome Collection, MS Hindi 371, fol. 151r.

The text facing the illustration (fol. 151r; fig. 3) is fittingly that of *Gyān-tilak*, the conversation between Kabīr and Rāmānand. The introductory colophon, written in red ink, may be read to attribute the text to Kabīr (*Kabīraji ko gyānatilaka liṣate*), but the final colophon also includes Rāmānand (*eti kabīra jī rāmānanda jī kā gyāna tilaka saṃpūrṇa*).

At the very beginning of the text appear the words *vo asvāmījī* (that Svāmī), followed by a bar in red ink.¹⁹ This seems to indicate the speaker, as it is followed with a volley of questions introduced by question words (*kona* [what kind], *ketāyaka* [how many], *kāhā* [what]), each separated from the next by punctuation in the Devanāgarī script: a *daṇḍa*, or “bar,” marked in

19 Alternatively, one could read *vo* as a variant spelling of the syllable *om*.

red ink. This makes sense if we consider the possible performance situation in which the manuscript may have been used. Perhaps it was intended to be read out loud while pointing at the image of Rāmānand.²⁰ The punctuation makes it clear that it is not to be taken as a vocative (also, *vo* is not attested as a vocative particle in Early Hindi); thus the questions are posed by, not addressed to, Rāmānand. To get some idea of the questions, here are the first few:

Kona sa nagrī, kona sa thāna
Kona sa loga basai pradhāna

Kona sa ka(m)pyai, kona sa basai
Ketāyaka vujāḍa, Ketāyaka basai

Kāhā kāla, Kāhā kāla kā bāsā
Kāhā gyāna, Kāhā gyāna kā musakalā

What is the citadel? What is its location?
 Who are the people established in headquarters?
 Who is it that trembles? Who is it that smiles?
 How many does it take to uproot [the dwelling]? How many to settle
 it down?
 What is time/death? What does time/death grab a hold of?
 What is wisdom? What is it that makes wisdom shine?

After the questions follows the formulaic expression in red ink:²¹

kaihata kabīra suṇo guru Rāmānanda jī
 Says Kabīr, “listen, Reverend guru Rāmānand.”

20 Throughout the text, he is referred to as *asvāmī jī* or *guru jī* (fols. 152r, 153v). There is also the formulaic *kaihata rāmānandajī suno kabīra jī* (fol. 151r).

21 This expression occurs also elsewhere in the text (fol. 152r).

This is followed by what are marked as three separate lines (though only the first *daṇḍa* is marked in red):

Yā darīyyāva bharyā /
karītī /
sataguru hoyā saba tāvai /

This ocean is filled,
 (with) praise
 to the one who is the true guru of all.

One could debate whether “the true guru of all” refers to Rāmānand, but in *bhakti* texts it often stands interchangeably for God.

Then follows what seems to indicate the next speaker: *putā* (son).²² We are led to understand this to refer to Kabīr, who addresses his interlocutor as “Guru Rāmānand,” answering the latter’s questions point by point:

kāyyā nagrī, haradā asathāna
mana rājā, pavana pradbāna

gyāna ka(m)pyai mana hasai
Ajana vijaḍa, Nīranjana basai

Nīdrā kāla krodha kāla kā bāsā
Brama gyāna, sīla gyāna kā myānā
santoṣa gyāna kā musakalā

The body is the citadel. The heart is the location.
 The mind is the king. The wind/breath [is established in]
 headquarters.
 Wisdom is what trembles. The mind is who smiles.

22 This *putā* occurs on other occasions (twice on fol. 151v, once on 152r, and twice on 154r), nearly each time just after a question and just before an answer. At one point in the text, the conversation partner is indicated also as *kabīr jī* (fol. 152v).

The undeserving uproot and the Absolute settles the dwelling.
 Sleep is time/death. Anger is where time/death takes hold.
 Brahma is wisdom. Virtue is wisdom's sheath.
 Contentment is what makes wisdom shine.

This role division may surprise us in light of the hagiographic story, as there Kabīr came across as the one in search of wisdom, and Rāmānand as the fount of wisdom. In this text, most of the time it appears to be Kabīr answering the questions of the purported guru.²³ One could surmise a teaching situation where Rāmānand is “quizzing” Kabīr, asking him questions in a standard format, perhaps not unlike Sufi interrogations of the “catechism” attested as early as the thirteenth century.²⁴ Yet, there is never an issue of who does the questioning and who the answering there. We are not the only ones puzzled by this ambiguous situation.

Edited Versions of the Dialogue

How have editors of *Gyān-tilak* interpreted the dialogue between Kabīr and Rāmānand? The text was edited and published by the Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā in Benares in 1955. Here it is understood as one of the “works of Rāmānand,” as the title of the slim volume is *Rāmānand kī Hindī Racnāen*. In fact, the text is given twice within this volume, once in the main corpus of the work (pp. 12–16), and this is the best-known text, one could say

23 A similar confusion is also noted in connection with the dialogue between Kabīr and Gorakhnāth. See Bahadur Singh, “Problems of Authenticity in the Kabīr Texts Transmitted Orally in Rajasthan Today,” in *Images of Kabīr*, ed. Monika Horstmann (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 196.

24 One of the disciples of Mu‘īn ad-dīn Chistī produced a very similar sounding work, *Uṣūl aṭ-ṭarīqah*. See Bruce Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute: Sufi Literature in Pre-Mughal India* (Tehran: Imperial Academy of Philosophy, 1978), 36–37. Ironically, this type of questioning with rigid allegorical answers seems far removed from the transformative riddles found elsewhere in Kabīr’s poetry, on which Linda Hess has eloquently written in her “The Cow Is Sucking at the Calf’s Teat: Kabir’s Upside-Down Language,” *History of Religions* 22, no. 4 (1983): 313–37.

the vulgate. For instance, it served as the basis of the sole translation of the work in Italian produced by the University of Turin scholar Pinuccia Caracchi in collaboration with the respected Banaras Hindu University Hindi scholar Shukdev Singh.²⁵ This edition of the text was prepared by the aforementioned Hindi scholar Pītāmbar Datt Bārthvāl before his passing in 1944. His work was then seen to publication by Hazārīprasād Dvivedī, under whose direction a second version of the text with significant permutations was included in appendix 2 (*parīṣiṣṭa*).²⁶ All scholarship on this topic is deeply indebted to these careful and formidable scholars of Hindi literature, on whose shoulders we are fortunate to stand to understand better this difficult literature. It appears, however, that there are major differences between the two edited texts that we need to understand to evaluate their meaning.

In Bārthvāl's version, the text of the *Gyān-tilak* proper is preceded by several philosophical verses on the process of creation that evoke Kabīrdās as a listener in the last line (v. 12 on p. 12). This is followed by a group of stanzas, the last of which also refers to Kabīrdās. The *Gyān-tilak* proper is then introduced by the following lines:

Aba kī bera mohi bakasalyau kadama dāsa kabīra
Gura rāmānanda ke badana pai sadaka karūṃ sarīra
Svāmī jī tumba satagura hama dāsā . . .
pūchūṃ eka sabada kā bbeva, karo kṛpā kaho gura deva (GT1: vv. 1–2)

This time, please grant me [a place at] your feet, [says] the servant

Kabīr

For the words of guru Rāmānand, I would surrender my body.

Reverend Svāmī, you are the true guru and I am the servant . . .

May I ask the secret of one of your utterances, please be merciful and tell me, Lord Guru.

25 *Rāmānanda e lo yoga dei sant* (Alessandria: Edizione dell'Orso, 1999).

26 In the preface, Dvivedī says he worked with the help of Daulat Rām Juyāl and Bhuvaneśvar Gauḍ. The appendix is on pp. 31–37.

With such a humble introduction of Kabīr, the reader is naturally led to understand that the following verses (3–6) with the questions that constitute the beginning of the *Gyān-tilak* proper would be asked by Kabīr and might assume the introductory hypermetrical word *svāmī jī* (given between parentheses in the edited text and not preceded by the demonstrative pronoun) would be a vocative, addressing Rāmānand:

(*Svāmī jī*) *kauna sī nagarī, kauna asthāna, kauna loga basain paradhāna*
(Reverend Svāmī) what is the citadel, what is the location, who are the people dwelling in headquarters?

This impression is strengthened by the printed edition's visually grouping the questions together, and concluding the last couplet with the phrase *kabaiṃ kabīra guru Rāmānanda jī yaba dariyāva bharā kai rītā* (v. 6), which is similar to what we saw in the manuscript, except that the vowels of the final word are different, notably a diphthong for the first vowel (*karītī* becomes *kai rītā*), and the word is split up; thus the first part, *kai*, becomes the question word, and the second, *rītā*, is an adjective meaning “empty.” The full line then comes to mean, “Says Kabīr: Reverend Guru Rāmānand, is this ocean full or empty?”

In addition, the next set of verses that provides the answer to each of the questions in turn is introduced by *suno sidhā* (“Listen, oh siddha”; without parentheses, thus regularized as part of the verse). In this edition, this vocative is again portrayed as the beginning of the allegorical answer by integrating it in the first line:

Suno sidhā kāyā nagarī bṛdaya asthāna
Pāñca loga basain (pradhāna) mana rājā pauna pradhāna

Listen, oh yogi, the body is the citadel, the heart is the location.
Five people dwell (in the capital) the mind is the king, the breath
is foremost.

The revelation continues along similar lines as in our manuscript (with significant variants), ending with:

Kabīra suno sabada kā bheva, hṛdayā basam nirañjana deva
Kabīra jī ye lyau nagarī kā bheva

Listen Kabīr, to the secret of the word, when the Absolute dwells
 in the heart.

Kabīr jī, take this to be the secret of the citadel.

In Barṭhwal's redaction, then, Kabīr is the one asking the questions, and Rāmānand the one answering. Reading on, the situation becomes somewhat confused as to who is asking the questions and who is answering, but clarity returns; for instance, midway through the text the aforementioned formulaic expression occurs a second time, with a small permutation, and this time appears within parentheses, suggesting it is hypermetrical:

Japa karam tapa karam koṭi tīratha bhrama āvain
(kabai kabīra suno guru Rāmānanda jī) jugati bina jogesvara
kasa kari parama pada pāvai (v. 28)

Reciting rosary, performing asceticism, coming back from hundreds
 of pilgrimages,
 (Says Kabīr, listen Reverend guru Rāmānand:) without uniting with
 the Lord of yoga, how could one reach the highest realm?

In light of the previous line, the last one could be a rhetorical question, contrasting traditional pious-works-oriented religiosity with union with God. However, through the insertion of the speaker, Kabīr, and his appeal to the guru, it is turned into a real question. This intervention is strategically placed so that if the reader were confused about who is saying what, this would help get him back on the track laid out earlier—that is, interpreting Kabīr as asking questions and Rāmānand as providing answers. The last verse confirms this once again:

Agama nigama bai pantha hamārā sāṣā āra (patra) amī rasa pīyā
Suno kabīra jī so jogesvara juga juga jīyā (v. 58)

Our path is hard and difficult to reach,²⁷ branch and leaf²⁸ have
 absorbed the nectar of immortality.
 Listen, Kabīr, the Lord of yoga has lived aeon after aeon!

In sum, this vulgate *Gyān-tilak* casts Rāmānand as the wise man imparting his secrets of wisdom to Kabīr. Through editorial interventions, such as the visual arrangement of the verses, the bracketing within parentheses (or not) of the conversation partners, and the recasting of statements as questions, this dialogue has acquired a definite hierarchical structure in favor of Rāmānand as guru and Kabīr as disciple. Perhaps this is natural given the editor Barṭhwāl's view of the important role Rāmānand plays in the great Indian heritage of *bhakti*, which he expressed elsewhere in his works.²⁹ Barṭhwāl felt strongly that the new nation needed the "Nirguṇa School" (8–9) with its "harmonious blending of practically all that is good in the Indian spiritual thought," including "the practice of Yoga . . . , the monism of Śaṅkarācārya, the doctrine of Grace, the sensuous intensity of the passion of devotion" (xii). While Kabīr may have articulated this best in his strident poetry, the inspiration came from Rāmānand, to whom goes the credit of combining devotion with earlier strands like the yoga of the Nāths and the prestigious philosophy of the Sanskrit tradition based on the Upaniṣads in a coherent system of thinking (esp. pp. xiii–xiv). Not coincidentally, this repudiated the need for crediting *bhakti*'s critique of caste and iconoclasm to Islam and its spirituality to Sufism. Even though it was hard to deny, given his name, that Kabīr may have been influenced by Islam, the Hindu nationalists' narrative could neutralize this because his guru taught him the essence based purely on Hindu sources. Barṭhwāl had proudly announced his discovery of Rāmānand's works that confirmed the guru's important position in formulating the new spirituality (xvi). Naturally he

27 This is how Pinuccia Caracchi translates it, but she remarks in her notes that this may also be an assertion that the path is orthodox, i.e., based on Āgama and Nigama texts (*Rāmānanda e lo yoga dei sant*, 348–49).

28 It is unclear here why the parentheses were used. I presume that it is a correction of the reading of the previous word as āra, which makes little sense.

29 He articulates this clearly in the preface of his *Traditions of Indian Mysticism*.

would be inclined to read the *Gyān-tilak* as Rāmānand's instruction to Kabīr rather than the other way around.

We should be careful, though, not to ascribe this approach wholesale to editorial intervention: Barṭhwāl based his edition on a manuscript preserved in the Āryabhāṣā Pustakālay collection of the Nāgarī Pracārīṇī Sabhā in Benares. According to the catalogue, the *Gyān-tilak* manuscript preserved in this collection was written in 1809 in Rāmkoṭ in Ayodhya.³⁰ This text came from a sectarian corner from the Rāmānand-sampradāy, so it would be natural to portray Rāmānand, the guru, as superior.

Let us turn now to the second version of the dialogue in the appendix to the same edition of Rāmānand's works. This one, prepared after Barṭhwāl's passing by Dvivedī's team, is different. In this version, clearly, it is Svāmī jī who asks the questions, and Kabīr who provides the answers, which are introduced and prominently set off on a separate line with the Sanskritic-sounding *Kabīra uvāca*. This version also contains a (somewhat different, though there is some overlap) philosophical introduction by Kabīr about creation (pp. 31–32), before the *Gyān-tilak* proper starts (at the middle of p. 32). This, however, is presented as in response to a question by Rāmānand, whose question opens the work in this version; he seeks to know the basis of creation, and Kabīr's lofty answer starts with *anabad*, "the unstruck sound," thus giving this yogic Nāth concept pride of place.

The appendix's *Gyān-tilak* proper (32–37) overlaps significantly with the vulgate, but apart from the switch in role of the interlocutors, the verses also appear in a different sequence, with multiple permutations, the significance of which merits closer study. Suffice it for our purpose to emphasize that the interrogator is nearly consistently *svāmījī* and the answers are provided under the lofty rubric *kabīra uvāca* ("Thus spoke Kabīr").

It should be said that while Kabīr has gained (or retained) the upper hand in the conversation, Rāmānand is emphatically confirmed as Kabīr's guru in the last line:

30 This manuscript (vol. 1, no. 279/859), dated 1866 VS, starts with the invocation (*maṅgalācāraṇ*) *Shrī Rāmānujāya namaḥ*.

Hamsā choḍa sarovara kabīṃ na jāya, bhagata sarīrī upajī
Pāyā pada nirabāna
Guru rāmānanda ke bacana para sabda kā karo paramāna
Niraguna guru saraguna celā guru rāmānanda soṃ bāla huā melā

The swan does not leave the holy lake: the devotee emerged bodily and obtained the highest state.

By means of Guru Rāmānand’s words, prove the validity of [these] words.

The guru[’s God] is above qualities, the pupil[’s] is marked by all qualities. The child (Kabīr) met with guru Rāmānand.

The ambiguity of the Kabīr-Rāmānand relationship, then, is foregrounded here. In this specific configuration of the dialogue, it seems that Kabīr, the *nirguṇa* representative, instructs Rāmānand, the *saguṇa* one. Still, at the end it is explicitly confirmed that Kabīr as a child took initiation from guru Rāmānand.

Similarly, the colophon seems to ascribe the text to dual authorship:

Iti śrī guru rāmānanda kabīra kā jñāna tilaka sampūraṇa
 Thus is completed the “Mark of Wisdom” by Holy Guru Rāmānand
 [and] Kabīr.

This appendix version, transcribed by a different editor, is based on a different manuscript, which was preserved in the private collection of Uday Śaṅkar Śāstrī.³¹ It is related to the one in the next appendix (*parīṣiṣṭ* 3, pp. 38–48), which is a work attributed to Rāmānand’s guru Rāghavdās. Rāghavdās is considered to have forged a balance between yoga and *bhakti*.³² This confirms a favorite theme of Hazārīprasād Dvivedī’s, which he shared with Barṭhwāl—namely, that Kabīr’s significance lies in intermediating the

31 This is probably the same manuscript that is the basis of the three preceding works in the appendices (*Mānasī Sevā* [Spiritual Worship], *Gyān-līlā* [Wisdom’s Play], *Ātma-bodh* [Illumination of the Self]).

32 Similarly, Appendix 4 contains a work of Rāmānand that reconciles yoga and *bhakti*.

yoga legacy of Gorakhnāth and the Nāth yogīs.³³ Rāghavdās's text here is offered on the basis of a manuscript that the editor carefully demonstrates to be a seventeenth-century polemical text of one sub-branch that sought to promote the position of Kabīr in the Rāmānand-sampradāy.³⁴ While the editor does not explicitly link it to the *Gyān-tilak* text, one could well consider this assessment content-wise pertinent for the other manuscript too.

In connection with the interrelation between Nāth yogis and Sants, it should be pointed out that there is a related work, also called *Gyān-tilak*, that is attributed to Gorakhnāth, who is frequently seen as the founder of the Nāths. This work was included in the Barṭhwal edition cum Hindi explanation of Gorakh's collected works.³⁵ He based it on three manuscripts, one undated Sanskrit version and two others 1768 (1825 VS), and 1798 (1855 VS) from Jaipur collections (pp. 12–14). There are other (Dādūpanthī) manuscript versions, but all later or undated.³⁶ The content of this work has a few related stanzas, but on the whole it is quite different. For our purpose, it is most pertinent that the interlocutor of the Rāmānand-Kabīr version is also addressed as *sīdhā*, a term commonly used for Nāths. It is outside the scope of this article to compare the *Jñān-tilak* texts to establish these different sectarian approaches to the same literature. It suffices here to note that Gorakh's text is not in question-and-answer format, and no interlocutors are indicated. Therefore, this text is not really a dialogue, but rather an exposition of the guru's understanding of secret knowledge addressed to his disciples.

33 See J. S. Hawley, *A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 50–51. For Dvivedī, this was only the first stage of Kabīr's life before the conversion by Rāmānand, as noticed by J. S. Hawley in *Three Bhakti Voices* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 328.

34 He obtained it from the Hanumān temple in Govardhan, whose mahant was a Rāmānujī sādhu named Rāmsaraṇās (40–41).

35 *Gorakh Bānī*, 2nd ed. (Prayāg: Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan, 1947), 207–20.

36 A Hindi version attributed to Gorakhnāth, written in 1884, is preserved in the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Viśvavidyālay, Agra, acc. no. 1020.1 (42 fols.). A Sanskrit version attributed to Gorakhnāth is preserved in the Jawaharlal Nehru Library, Baba Mastnath Ayurvedic College, acc. no. R 98 (3 fols.). An undated manuscript is also preserved in the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur collection according to the catalogue, vol. 1, p. 58, no. 148 (20).

Historical Background of the Editions

The published versions of Rāmānand's dialogue with Kabīr have to be evaluated against the background of specific views the nationalist editors held on the role that *bhakti* could play to unify and strengthen the new nation. Ironically, the iconoclastic Kabīr is seen as a bridge-builder, reconciling yoga and devotion, which received Rāmānand's orthodox stamp of approval and was carefully kept separate of Islamic influence. There is, however, more to the issue than the nationalist-communist context. We should keep in mind the contentious climate of the Rāma devotional groups early in the twentieth century. At this time, an infra-sectarian break was forced by a radical Rāmānandī faction that had sought to eliminate all links with the Rāmānuja mother-*sampradāy* and to completely abolish caste-based distinctions. Ironically, this was accomplished through Sanskritizing Rāmānand himself and neglecting the Hindi works attributed to him.³⁷ In the process of producing evidence for their claims, the interested parties used a discourse of textual criticism and archeology in which archival retrieval, in particular the "discovery" of manuscripts, played a major role. In contrast to this polemic, the carefully reasoned edition of Rāmānand's works by Bārthwāl and Dvivedī may represent a scholarly countermove to reinscribe Rāmānand as a charismatic Hindi teacher, once again coopting the vernacular appeal of Kabīr, but in this case for the nationalist movement and, for Dvivedī, to establish *bhakti*'s "indigenous" nature, obliterating the need for acknowledging Islamic influence.³⁸ Thus they succeeded in changing the narrative of the *bhakti* movement's contribution to Hindu nationalism: in contrast to Rāmcandra Śukla's earlier privileging of Rāma and Krishna *saguna* literature over the *nirguna* saints deemed unsophisticated

37 This was spearheaded by Bhagvad Dās, later named Bhagvad Ācārya. See the revealing work of Puruṣottam Agrawal, especially his online article "In Search of Ramanand," in *Pratīlīpi*, esp. pp. 5–7 (<http://pratilipi.in/in-search-of-ramanand-purushottam-agrawal/5/>). Also see Pinch, *Peasants and Monks*, esp. chapter 2.

38 Monika Horstmann stresses that Dvivedī viewed Kabīr as an ideal man, evolving toward a spiritual view thanks to the intervention of his guru, much as Dvivedī himself was transformed in his meeting with Rabindranath Tagore (Horstmann, "Hazārīprasād Dvivedī's Kabīr," 120–22).

and influenced by Islam, the latter now were rehabilitated as indigenous providers of answers for the new nation's needs.³⁹

Dādūpanthī Context of the Manuscript

Similarly, we need to situate the Wellcome manuscript in its historical context. The clues provided by the colophon quoted above, namely the time of King Savāi Jai Singh II and the place—namely, the Rajasthani village Naraina—are very helpful. Naraina is a major seat of the Dādūpanthī, a sect looking to the late sixteenth-century cotton-carder saint Dādū Dayāl for its origins.⁴⁰ At the time the manuscript was written down in 1715, the Mahant, or “abbot,” in Naraina was Jaitrām (d. 1732), who was the first Brahmin head of the seat. He worked to establish his authority through an attempt to “clean up” the many divergent and idiosyncratic factions within the sect, which has been documented in the account of his abbotship, *Jayat-prakāś* (The Light of Jait[rām]).⁴¹ He did so notably with regard to commensuality rules, but also in connection with ritual exchanges between guru and disciple.⁴² The manuscript's focus on images of guru-disciple pairs, one of which features Dādū with his disciple, the singer Sundardās

39 Hawley, *Storm of Songs*, 44–45.

40 For a good succinct introduction, see Monika Horstmann, “Dādū Dayāl,” in *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

41 The text was authored by Jñāndās. Only one chapter of this lengthy hagiography has been published as *Panth-paddhati*. Details of the manuscript sources are unknown, but the text was definitely written before 1827. It has been translated and studied by Monika Horstmann, “The Flow of Grace: Food and Feast in the Hagiography and History of the Dādūpanth,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 150, no. 2 (2000): 546–47. She corroborates the evidence with reference to other sources, in particular documents from the Naraina archives.

42 For commensuality rules, see Horstmann, *Der Zusammenhalt der Welt: Religiöse Herrschaftslegitimation und Religionspolitik Mahārāja Savāi Jaisinghs (1700–1743)*. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 173. For the ritual exchanges, see Horstmann, “The Flow of Grace,” 546–47, on the basis of the document *Panth-paddhati* (written before 1827), of which she provides a translation and commentary, corroborating with other sources, in particular documents from the Naraina archives.



FIGURE 4. Sundardās and Dādū in conversation. Wellcome Collection, MS Hindi 371, fol. 146r.

(fol. 146r; fig. 4), fits well with the abbot's preoccupations at the time.⁴³ It is not unlikely that Sundardās's compositions became part of the Dādūpanthī liturgy at exactly this time.⁴⁴ The *Jayat-prakāś* articulates the obligation for Dādūpanthīs to collect the words of the Sants and carry those with them, which constitutes an immediate imperative for the writing of manuscripts, such as this one.⁴⁵

At the same time, Jaitrām was trying to coopt and stem the tide of growing influence of the *sadhus* of Rajput origin, who had formed the *Nāgā*

⁴³ Friedlander, *Descriptive Catalogue*, 602.

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Monika Horstmann for pointing this out (personal communication, 6 January 2018).

⁴⁵ Horstmann, "The Flow of Grace," 548.

or warrior faction. As mercenary troupes, the Nāgās were operating under a different economic regime than the *sadhus*, who had vowed monastic poverty. These militant orders had become increasingly powerful and keen to assert their independence from the abbot.⁴⁶ They refused to follow the Mahant's directions to become clean-shaven and asserted their own warrior-like identity.⁴⁷ In his efforts to establish his authority, Jaitrām was supported by another faction, the Utarādhās, or disciples from “the North”—that is, from Haryana and Punjab. This monastic business community had been heavily influenced by the Sikh model from the Punjab, and hence was involved in the building of Dādūpanthī *gurudvārās* and probably responsible for introducing the term *Khālsā* (for a faction in the Dādūpanth, now distinguished by dressing in white and wearing caps).⁴⁸ One wonders whether their influence is behind inclusion in the Wellcome Institute manuscript of the illustration of Guru Nānak (the first Sikh guru) in dialogue with a disciple identified as Harirāy (fol. 188v; fig. 5).⁴⁹

The Dādūpanthīs in general and the Nāgās in particular were subject to the influential reforms pushed through by Savāi Jai Singh II, the king and founder of nearby Jaipur, who is mentioned by name in the manuscript's colophon. He urged all *bhakti* communities to conform socially with orthodoxy (compliance with *varṇāśrama-dharma*), theologically with the four recognized *bhakti* sects (*catuḥ-sampradāya*), as well as militarily by establishing recognized orders of warrior ascetics (*ākḥādās*). In 1733, several Dādūpanthī *sadhus* signed a document to the effect that they would comply with Jai Singh's stipulations, including the prohibition for non-Brahmins to become abbots.⁵⁰ In 1756, furthering Jai Singh II's project, the influential

46 Horstmann, “The Flow of Grace,” 538–39.

47 James M. Hastings, “Poets, Sants, and Warriors: The Dadu Panth, Religious Change and Identity in Jaipur State Circa 1562–1860,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002, 46.

48 See Horstmann, “The Flow of Grace,” 544–45.

49 Friedlander, *Descriptive Catalogue*, 601. This may be an anachronistic, imagined dialogue with the seventh Sikh guru, who died in 1675.

50 The document is translated by Monika Horstmann in “Ein Kapitel nordindischer Religionspolitik im 18. Jahrhundert: Jaisingh II. Und die religiösen Orden,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 2, no. 1 (1994): 49–67.



FIGURE 5. Guru Nānak and Harirāy in conversation. Wellcome Collection, MS Hindi 371, fol. 188v.

Rāmānandī abbot Bālānand organized different bands of warrior ascetics in officially approved *ākhṇḍās*. At that time, he tried to bring the Dādūpanthīs under his influence, seeking a merger with his own Rāmānandī sect. While hardly conclusive, this slightly later context is suggestive. One wonders whether the manuscript's attention to boost Kabīr's position versus Rāmānand's is an early reflection of such power struggles between the Kabīr-championing Dādūpanthīs and the more orthodox-inclined Rāmānandīs at the time of Jai Singh.

Conclusion

We see that the dialogue between Kabīr and Rāmānand is redacted in many different ways: different manuscripts frame similar texts with different permutations, and so, it turns out, do the printed editions. Perhaps the transition from manuscript culture to print is not as radical a rupture as it is sometimes made out to be.

How to fathom this phenomenon of the multiple framings of the Early Hindi debate between Kabīr and Rāmānand? Perhaps we can turn to the visual arts for a parallel. A common technique in Indian painting was to copy details of successful painting compositions and transfer them into a new one, by tracing the master drawing on a thin vellum (*charba*) that was pierced along the outlines with a fine needle.⁵¹ Such “models” could be reused in different contexts to fit a different frame. Similarly, copies of existing paintings could be bound together in new contexts for a different patron with his own predilections, in particular in albums called *muraqqa’* or patchwork.⁵² Art historians have argued that rather than seeing such work as derivative and search for the original, it has to be valued in its own context.⁵³ Thus, to give an example relevant for our topic, there is a detail portraying Kabīr and the Sants from the border of an image “Dance of the Derwishes” depicting ecstatic Sufis dancing in Ajmer, most likely produced in Dara Shikoh circles in the mid-seventeenth century (fig. 6).⁵⁴

51 See, e.g., Percy Brown, *Indian Painting* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), 103–4.

52 See Elaine Julia Wright and Susan Stronge, eds., *Muraqqa’ Imperial Mughal Albums from the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 2008).

53 See, for instance, the extended study of the Lailah and Majnun theme as depicted in Rajasthani paintings in Molly Aitken, *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 154–209.

54 Elinor W. Gadon, “Note on the Frontispiece,” in Karin Schomer and W. H. McLeod, eds., *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsdass, 1987), 415–21. The painting can be viewed on the V&A website at <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O16063/khwaja-sahib-painting-unknown/>.



FIGURE 6. The Sants. Victoria & Albert Collection, detail of 016063 "Khwaja Sahib."
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

This image was lifted out of context, copied by Mir Kalan Khan circa 1770, and projected against the backdrop of a hut (fig. 7).⁵⁵ Rather than dismissing this second work as a mere copy, it would pay off to study the processes involved in this transfer and inclusion of the image in an album for a different patron.

The albums involved mounting and stitching of images, hence the name *Muraqqa'* or patchwork. Incidentally, the cloak of many derwishes and holy men is also made of such patchwork, as seen in the garb worn by Kabīr's son, Kamal, in the painting. The figure of Kamal is in turn lifted out of the painting and combined with that of Dara Shikoh in another image.⁵⁶ This practice of recycling images can be a metaphor for what we see happen to dialogic texts in print and manuscripts alike. Behind the printed page emerges a historically layered picture to reveal a kaleidoscopic arrangement of debates: never settled, always refracted anew.

55 The image is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art on view in gallery 463, acc. no. 2009.318. See Maryam Ekhtiar, Sheila R. Canby, Navina Haidar, and Priscilla P. Soucek, eds., *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), no. 253, pp. 341, 363–64, ill. p. 363 (color). It is also online at <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/>.

56 Now in British Library (J.19, 1). See J. P. Losty, "Ascetics and Yogis in Indian Paintings," British Library website, 15 August 2016, <http://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2016/08/ascetics-and-yogis-in-indian-painting.html>.



FIGURE 7. *A Gathering of Holy Men of Different Faiths* by Mir Kalan Khan, ca. 1770–75. Metropolitan Museum, acc. no. 2009.318.